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Abstract

In the midst of Covid-19 outbreak, students of all institution levels around the globe are enforced to embark on a new page in teaching and learning; Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in ensuring their continuous learning process. Likewise in Malaysia, since the enforcement of Movement Control Order (MCO), students from all over the country including LG120 students in Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor (UiTM CJ) are among the learners who are facing various ODL challenges such as bad internet connection, poor performance learning devices, inappropriate learning environment, and other related issues. Despite all the challenges, majority of the students have shown excellent commitment in attending ODL classes. Nevertheless, the lecturers are facing one of the most cliché class challenges; students' participation. The issue is getting more critical as the students are only visible and monitored virtually by the lecturers. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between UiTM CJ LG120 students' demographic (gender, number of semesters, residential area) and motivation variables with their participation in ODL classes. This study made use of a mixed-method approach where a set of questionnaires were distributed to 107 LG120 students (Semester 1,2,3) for the quantitative data, and an interview session with 10 of the students that were randomly selected for data triangulation. The findings are expected to assist lecturers in their ODL lesson plan and student's participation monitoring process as students' participation and demographic variables showed an insignificant result except for number of semesters. Meanwhile, it was also found that students' participation was highly motivated by three main themes namely accessibility, lecturers' creativity and platforms used in ODL classes.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), Demographic Variables, Motivation Variables, Students' Participation, LG120 Students

Introduction

An effective classroom instruction should witness an active communication and participation from both the instructors and students. It is impossible to neglect the students' motivation variables to participate in a classroom activity while discussing their level of participation. The mentioned challenge is not just a critical issue to instructors since students are also facing a hard time doing it especially when attending the class virtually; Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Following the Covid-19 outbreak, the year of 2020 has challenged mankind in all aspects of life and educational sector is no exception. Abu Bakar et al (2023) highlighted that the sudden outbreak of pandemic Covid-19 has shifted educational sector to a new classroom instruction which is Open and Distance Learning (ODL). Yusof et al (2021) added Malaysia Movement Control Order (MCO) was also the main cause for ODL to steal the limelight in the educational sector as it is impossible to execute face-to-face session. The execution of ODL has brought together some challenges to the parties involved. Students of LG120 or Diploma in English for Professional Communication in Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor (UiTM CJ) are among the parties who are facing various ODL challenges such as bad internet connection, learning devices with poor performance, inappropriate learning environment, and other related issues.

Problem Statement

The shift of physical classroom approach to Open and Distance Learning (ODL) approach has assisted the education world in facing the pandemic outbreak. However, lecturers and students are facing some barriers especially in terms of students' participation and coping pace, as well as lecturers' lesson plans that are expected to fit all needs (Abdul Muin, 2021). In addition, as cited in Yusof et al (2021); Browning et. al (2021) claimed that students might experience lack of motivation, anxiety, stress, and isolation due to the changes caused by the pandemic.

Research Questions and Objectives

The research questions of the study are

1. Is there any significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, number of semesters, residential area) of LG120 students and their motivation to participate in ODL class?
2. What are LG120 students' motivation variables to participate in ODL class?

The objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, number of semesters, residential area) of LG120 students and their motivation to participate in ODL class.
2. To investigate LG120 students' motivation variables to participate in ODL class.

Literature Review

Open and Distance Learning (ODL)

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the education of almost 1.5 billion students from more than 165 countries worldwide (Shin, 2020) ergo; the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) has taken a very commendable decision in allowing the lecturers to perform their teaching and learning responsibilities from home (MOHE, 2020). The decision was confirmed as to ensure the active learning process is not disrupted due to the enforcement of Movement Control Order (MCO). In the study by Aminuddin et al (2021), Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has

listed the new way of conducting teaching and learning process where the lecturers and the students are not necessarily present at the same time and place. In other words, students can control the learning process from their own comfort zone without having to be physically present with their lecturers. There are two main options that can be practised by the lecturers in conducting ODL class; synchronous or asynchronous (Wan Chik, Khalid, Saifullizam, Kamaruddin & Mat Zin). Synchronous ODL class enables the lecturers and students to meet virtually at the same time and platform, where asynchronous ODL class requires lecturers to distribute lecture notes or tasks that could be completed by the students out of the actual class slot. Lecturers can opt for any method as long as the lesson can be effectively delivered. In spite of that, Karim (2020) suggested that asynchronous ODL approach is a better choice for the teachers to hold a learning session with students from the rural areas as the internet connection is still the main issue for them.

Demographic Variables

As cited in Onwubiko (2020), demographic variables are independent variables that are impossible to be manipulated. The examples are gender, race, marital status, years of education, income, family size and other possible information (Sage Research Method, 2020). The other definition from IGI Global (2020) also provides almost similar details about demographic variables which are the attributes of human population that are recorded statistically, for instance gender, age, and other related items.

Motivation Variables: Intrinsic and Extrinsic

Motivation should be given extra attention when dealing with ODL as the students are prone to feel isolated, alone, and helpless during the learning session (Ng, 2023). The discussion on motivation for learning should be outlined in two parts; intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. As cited in Chung, Subramaniam and Dass (2020), intrinsic motivation deals with mental, social, and physical development of an individual's interest in making certain actions or decisions in life. Meanwhile, external motivation can be defined as the inclination to succeed for external rewards (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, number of semesters, residential area) of LG120 students and their motivation to participate in ODL class.

H₁: There is a significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, number of semesters, residential area) of LG120 students and their motivation to participate in ODL class.

Methodology

This is a mixed-method sequential explanatory study involving quantitative; questionnaires on demographic variables and motivation variables to participate in ODL class, and qualitative data; online interview for their motivation variables. The purposive sampling technique was used in the study as the focus is on UiTMCJ LG120 students (semester 1, 2, and 3) who were also the first batches that faced ODL.

The data collection involved a set of questionnaires containing questions on LG120 students' demographic and motivation variables in terms of their participation in ODL class.

The questionnaire was distributed in the form of online Google Form. Then, 10 students were randomly selected from the group to get their insights on their motivation variables connected to their participation in ODL class. The interview was conducted using Cisco Webex application. The qualitative approach is added to triangulate the data obtained as suggested by Lemon and Hayes (2020) that claimed qualitative research captures people's actual experiences which leads to wide understanding of an issue.

The data analysis for RQ1 made use of SPSS; Pearson's chi-square (X^2), and Spearman's correlation while for RQ2, thematic analysis was used where the data obtained were recorded and manually transcribed and subsequently analysed by seeking the recurring themes.

Results and Discussions

Findings

This section highlights the results of the study based on the research questions.

RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between demographic variables (gender, number of semesters, residential area) of LG120 students and their motivation to participate in ODL class?

To address RQ1, Pearson Chi-Square and Spearman Correlation Coefficient test were executed to examine the relationship between demographic variables and students' motivation to participate in ODL class.

Relationship between gender and students' motivation to participate in ODL class.

Pearson Chi-Square was used to examine the relationship between nominal and categorical data (gender and students' motivation to participate in ODL class).

Table 1

Chi-Square Test (Gender & Motivation)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5.399 ^a	2	.067
Likelihood Ratio	4.892	2	.087
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.996	1	.158
N of Valid Cases	107		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.29.

Table 1 shows an insignificant relationship at 5% significance level between gender and students' motivation to participate in ODL class ($x^2 = 5.339$, $df = 2$, $p = .067$). Therefore, H1 was not supported. The result is in line with Sen and Samdup (2009) which recorded gender was not found as an independent variable that influenced the learners' motivation to respond in ODL session.

Relationship between number of semesters and students' motivation to participate in ODL class.

To examine the relationship between ordinal and categorical data (number of semesters and students' motivation to participate in ODL class), Spearman Correlation Coefficient test was executed.

Table 2

Spearman's Correlation Test (Number of Semester & Motivation)

Correlations			MotivationPa rticipateODL	Semester
Spearman's rho	MotivationParticipate ODL	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.371**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
	Semester	N	107	107
		Correlation Coefficient	.371**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	107	107

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As presented in Table 2, Spearman's analysis reveals that there were moderately positive and statistically significant correlations between numbers of semesters and students' motivation to participate in ODL class; $r_s = .37$, $n = 107$, $p < .001$. Hence, H1 was supported. This is consistent with the findings from previous research by Chung et al (2020) where learners who experienced ODL as first-timers faced more challenges including their motivation to participate in class compared to the seniors who had experienced it earlier.

Relationship between residential area and students' motivation to participate in ODL class.

The relationship between nominal and categorical data (residential area and students' motivation to participate in ODL class) was examined using Pearson Chi-Square.

Table 3

Chi-Square Test (Residential Area & Motivation)

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.433 ^a	6	.999
Likelihood Ratio	.371	6	.999
Linear-by-Linear Association	.026	1	.872
N of Valid Cases	107		

a. 6 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .56.

Based on Table 3, there was an insignificant relationship at 5% significance level between residential area and students' motivation to participate in ODL class ($\chi^2 = .433$), $df = 6$, $p = .999$). Therefore, H1 was not supported. The finding is supported by the previous study by Mathew and Chung (2020) as the location of ODL engagement was not a critical issue as other issues studied were more critical to be paid attention to when discussing ODL.

Based on the findings gathered from the three correlation tests for demographic variables, there was no significant relationship found between demographic variables and LG120 students' motivation to participate in ODL class.

RQ2: What are LG120 students' motivation variables to participate in ODL class?

RQ2 was explored using a group interview session focusing on the students' motivation variables to participate in ODL class. The data gathered were then transcribed and analysed using the thematic analysis approach. The three main themes yielded from the analysis were presented in the following tree diagram.

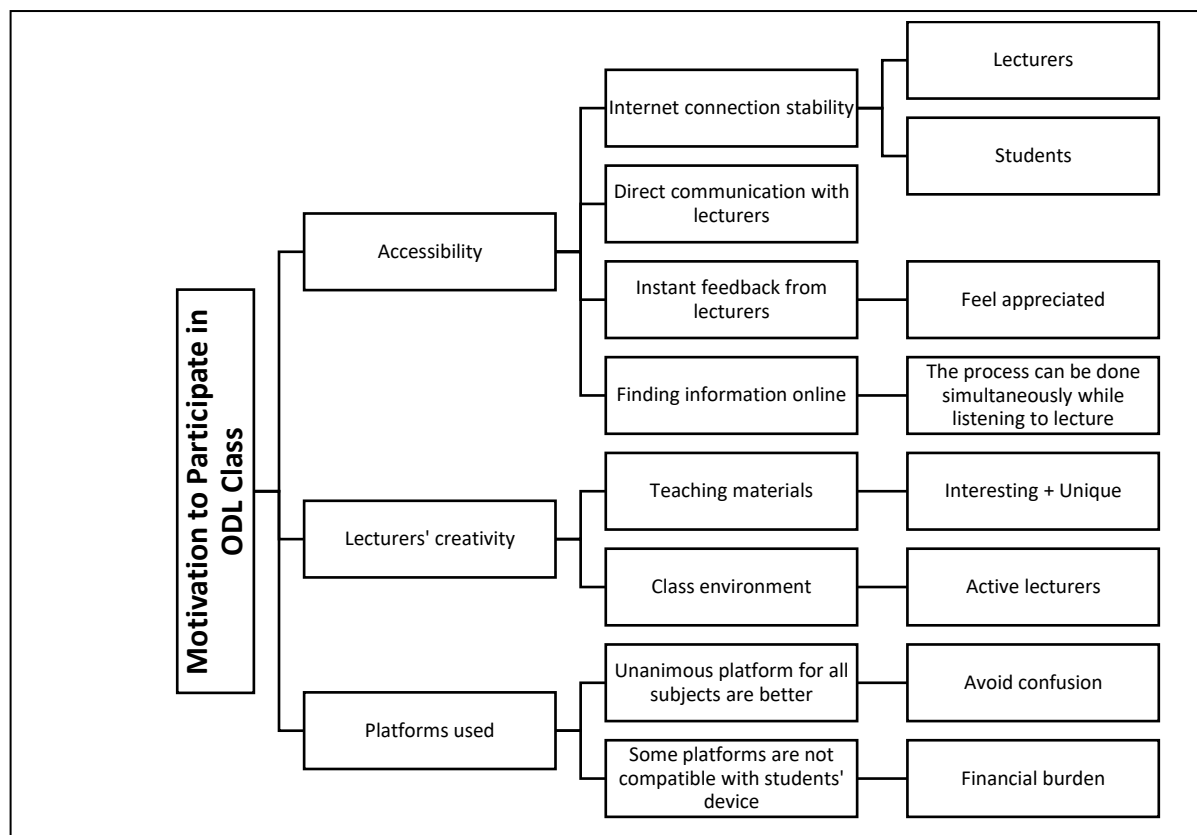


Figure 1: Tree diagram (LG120 students' motivation to participate in ODL class.)

The tree diagram depicts the students' motivation to participate in ODL class. There are three main keywords listed; accessibility, lecturers' creativity and platforms used which fall under both intrinsic (personal, learning satisfaction) and extrinsic (enjoying external rewards; compliments from lecturers) motivation category. The keywords were derived from the students' opinion based on their ODL experience.

Accessibility (Intrinsic+Extrinsic) - Based on the diagram, students feel motivated to participate in ODL class if the internet connection is stable for both lecturers and students. This is because, if only one party enjoys a good internet connection flow, the communication will not be effective caused by the delayed response. Furthermore, the students demand direct communication with the lecturers to ensure the effectiveness of communication. Other than that, students really appreciate immediate response from the lecturers as it motivates them to participate more in the session. The students also feel motivated to participate since they can simultaneously find information to solidify their understanding while listening to the lecture.

Lecturers' Creativity (Intrinsic) – The students believe that lecturers need to be creative in inventing and providing the teaching materials to motivate students' participation in ODL class. The students will be influenced by the lecturers; active lecturers who provide interesting and unique learning environment in ODL class can direct the students to be with them

actively. As found by Lugosi and Uribe (2020), lecturers that employ various active learning strategies sustain motivation and increases engagement.

Platforms Used (Intrinsic) – Majority of the students believe that having a unanimous ODL platform can motivate them to participate actively in ODL class. This is important in avoiding students' confusion especially when dealing with several subjects, lecturers, and surely assessments. Furthermore, some platforms chosen by the lecturers require certain command for a device to work effectively. This can cause a financial burden to students especially those who come from a middle-income family who might be having other issues to prioritise on than just upgrading their devices for ODL class.

The findings are consistent with the previous research by Mathew and Chung (2020), as the quality of internet connection, encouraging initiatives by the lecturers in their lesson delivery and the ODL platforms used were the factors contributing to learners' ODL participation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in discussing students' motivation for ODL class participation, attention should be given to more than just one variable. The findings show that gender and location do not affect student's level of motivation to participate in ODL classes. However, it is noteworthy that students in higher semester have higher level of motivation compared to students in semester one who face ODL for the first time. This is associated with their intrinsic motivation where their physical and interest in making decisions have been developed throughout the semesters as compared to the semester one students who have not had such an experience. Therefore, it is suggested that this factor is taken into consideration as far as instructional design is concerned, so that anxiety or unwillingness among the first-timers may be alleviated. In addition to that, the study also shows that a mix of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation; accessibility, lecturers' creativity and platforms used, influence LG120 students' participation in ODL class. Evidently, stable internet connection, creative instructional design and unanimous learning platforms across courses help to sustain motivation and increase engagement. Therefore, these prominent findings should be taken seriously by educators and university administrators in ensuring effective ODL sessions are planned for their students.

Suggestion for Future Research

Based on the study, it is recommended for researchers to explore other possible variables that could be connected to students' motivation for ODL class participation. Researchers could also include participants with different majors to widen the findings possibilities as compared to the current study that involved only language students.

Co-Author Contribution

There is no conflict of interest in this article. Author 1 and 2 prepared the results and discussions, author 3 prepared the methodology, author 4,5,6 prepared the literature review and reviewed the paper.

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